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ABSTRACT

Group and family day care settings were compared with respect to 16 child, teacher, and environmental variables. A total of 25 children, ranging in age from 3 to 5 years, served as representatives of group day care; 16 children, also ranging from 3 to 5 years in age, served as representatives of family day care. Child variables of interest were positive social interaction with peers and adults; prosocial peer behavior; helping behavior; imaginative play/role playing; prosocial, hostile, and total aggression; task persistence; and waiting patiently during delays. Teachers were rated on provision of structure and possession of personal warmth. Environmental characteristics observed were health and safety; materials, equipment, and activities; and physical space. Trained undergraduate observers unaware of the purpose of the study completed the assessments of children, teachers, and environments. Observers also recorded the number of children present during the observational period as well as the number of participating adults. Analysis indicated a significant difference in 3 of the 16 comparisons: teachers' structuring behavior, children's positive interaction with adults, and number of children per teacher. Group care was found to have significantly more teacher structuring and positive interaction between children and adults, while family care had fewer children per teacher. It was concluded that findings suggest the possibility that, in general, no overwhelming and meaningful differences between group and family day care exist in many of the variables examined. (RH)

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A COMPARISON OF GROUP AND FAMILY DAY CARE

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A Comparison of Group and Family Day Care

Group and family day care settings were compared with respect to: a) child (positive interactions, prosocial behavior, aggression, imaginative play, etc.); b) teacher (warmth, structure); and c) environmental (health and safety, materials, physical space) variables. Analysis indicated a significant difference in three (structure, positive interaction with adults, number of children per teacher) of sixteen comparisons. The possibility was discussed that group and family day care may not differ significantly or meaningfully in many areas of importance.

Daytime care of children continues to be of increasing concern in the U.S. (see Hofferth, 1979). An impressive amount of information is now available concerning group day care centers and nursery school programs. "Family day care" (serving five or fewer children) has been largely ignored. Ironically, family day care serves as the greatest source of substitute care outside of the home for preschool children in the United States today (see Belsky & Steinberg, 1978).

Family day care has not been totally ignored. For example, the Department of Health, Education and Welfare has published a manual for family day care providers (Seefeldt & Dittman, 1973), as have several states (cf., Child Development Training Program, 1980; Community Coordinated Child Care, 1974), and several popular authors (cf., Collins & Watson, 1976; Griffin, 1973). In California, an extensive effort was directed toward providing supportive services to family day care providers (cf., Sale, 1973; Sale, Torres & Davis, 1973). Similarily, Goodman and Andrews (1981) introduced structured educational programs into existing family day care homes. Several other individuals have focused on characteristics of "good" family day care providers, with subsequent consideration of selection and training of such providers (Colbert & Enos, 1975; Rodriguez & Hignet, 1976; Wattenberg, 1977).

Questions related to the actual environment and/or child development outcomes of family (as opposed to group) day care appear infrequently asked, and available research results often appear contradictory. For example, Willner (1971) found that black working mothers in New York City dislike family day care, and use it only when group day care is not

available. Many white working mothers in Oregon, on the other hand, appear satisfied with and to actually prefer family day care (Emlen, Donaghue & Clarkson, 1974; Emlen, Donaghue & La Forge, 1971). Clearly, regional and/or urban-rural differences may have affected these results.

Predominant opinions among professionals can also be quite contradictory. For example, Urich, Case, Harvey, Pardee and Pitt (1972) pointed out the following possible major disadvantages of family day care:

1) Less stimulating experiences for cognitive and physical development.

2) Less group experience with peers.

3) Less professional supervision and fewer quality controls.

Emlen, Donaghue and La Forge (1971), on the other hand, pointed out the following possible major advantages of family day care:

1) Comfortable and familiar "extended family" setting.

2) Nurturant caretaker capable of providing new social learning experiences.

3) Less risk of abuse or deprivation than is commonly assumed.

Although the following questions would appear of paramount importance in comparing family and group day care, very little related evidence is currently available.

1) What differences exist between typical family and group day care teachers? For example, are group teachers more structured in their activities? Are family providers more nurturant and supportive?

2) What differences exist between typical family and group day care environments? For example, do group day care centers more adequately provide for health, material and space needs of the children?

3) What differences exist between typical child activities in the two environments? For example, is one or the other more likely to promote prosocial behavior, aggression, positive interactions, creativity or task persistence?

In spite of the apparent importance of the preceeding questions, only three studies to date appear relevant. In the first, Cochran (1977) found that family as opposed to group day care children in Sweden were more likely to be exploring their surroundings and to be interacting with adults in cognitive-verbal situations and in ways that led to limit setting by the adults. For a variety of other comparisons in the study, the differences proved nonsignificant. In a second study, Prescott (1978) found primarily that group day care tends to be more structured than family day care. On the other hand, Innes, Woodman, Banspach, Thompson, & Inwald (1982) found that "group day care homes" (serving twelve children) were more structured than day care centers. Further, adult-child interaction, social emotional climate, and social participation were of "higher quality" in the group day care homes.

The intent of the present research was to further investigate the preceeding questions. As the study was largely exploratory, no specific hypotheses were formulated beforehand. A survey of the research literature indicated the appropriateness of the following evaluative devices: (1) for environmental variables, a scale developed by Bradbard and Endsley

(1978); (2) for both teacher and child variables, a scale developed by Huston-Stein, Freidrich-Cofer and Susman (1977).

Method

Subjects

Twenty-five children, ranging from 3-to-5 years of age, served as representatives of group day care. There were five children selected randomly from each of the five largest private centers (licensed for 25 to 35 children) in one rural midwestern county. Twelve of the children were males, thirteen females; and all were Caucasian.

Sixteen children, also ranging from 3-to-5 years of age, served as representatives of family day care. Eight of the children were males, eight females; and all were Caucasian. Family day care providers were found through newspaper advertisements, through word of mouth, or through whatever means we could think of. Unfortunately, out of approximately 85 potential family day care providers contacted throughout the county, only eight were willing and able to participate in the study. The majority were not caring for children at the time of contact, most did not plan to in the near future (leading us admittedly to question from time to time the stability of family day care). In addition, four were not willing to participate for personal reasons.

Procedure

Trained undergraduate observers (unaware of the purpose of the study) completed the assessments of children, teachers, and environments. After approximately 15 minutes in a center or home (to familiarize the children with his or her presence), the observer began to watch one

randomly selected child. Using a one-minute time sampling procedure (checking any behavior that occurred during the one-minute period) for a one-hour period, the child was assessed using a scale developed, validated and outlined by Huston-Stein, Freidrich-Cofer and Susman (1977). The scale includes the following indices:

1. Positive social interaction with peers (any form of positive or neutral verbal interchange that is more than fleeting).
2. Prosocial behavior to peers (cooperation, helping, praise, sympathy, affection).
3. Helping peers (offering help or materials).
4. Positive social interaction with adults (same as for with peers, except with adults).
5. Imaginative play pretending an object is something else, or playing a role; either alone or with someone else).
6. Prosocial aggression (tattling, commands, enforcing rules).
7. Hostile aggression (physical or verbal attacks; interfering with another's activities).
8. Total aggression (sum of prosocial and hostile aggression, plus aggression toward objects).
9. Task persistence (continued concentration on an activity, even if difficulty is encountered).
10. Waiting patiently during delays (when something child wants is not immediately available).

During the same period of time, observers were also observing teacher or provider activities, and subsequently rated them (scale

of 1 to 5) on the following characteristics (also from Huston-Stein, Freidrich-Cofer and Sussman, 1977):

1. Structure (academically oriented, class-activities structured, insistence upon attention to tasks).

2. Warmth (private communication, approval, physical affection, good natured, supportive; does not negatively evaluate, publicly humiliate or act sarcastically toward children).

In addition, observers looked at and subsequently evaluated the following environmental characteristics (adapted from Bradbard and Endsley, 1978):

1. Health and safety (cleanliness, supervision, first aid supplies available, toys safe, child records kept, etc.).

2. Materials, equipment and activities (books, puppets, games, both quiet and active play, music, painting, etc.).

3. Physical space (lockers or cubbies, nap area, appropriate temperature, storage space, appropriate outdoor and indoor play areas, etc.).

Finally, observers recorded the number of children present during the observational period, as well as the number of participating adults (allowing for an assessment of the teacher-child ratio). In sum, the design offered comparisons (t-tests) between family and group day care for sixteen child, teacher and environment variables.

Results and Discussion

Means, standard deviations, and t-test results for each of the sixteen child, teacher and environment variables are outlined in

Table 1. Of the sixteen possible comparisons, three proved significant (structure, positive interaction with adults, number of children per teacher).

(Insert Table 1 about here)

The significant finding for number of children per teacher is to be expected. The finding for "structure" is consistent with Prescott's (1978) previously cited finding; but inconsistent with that of Innes et al. (1982), who found group day care homes more structured than day care centers. Similarily, our finding that children in day care had significantly more positive interactions with adults is inconsistent with the findings of Innes et al. (1982). The preceeding inconsistencies could be the result of several differences: their "group day care homes" served twelve children, our "family day care" served five or fewer; their sample consisted of three year olds, ours ranged from three to five years; their study was conducted in a metropolitan area, ours in a relatively rural setting; their samples were "mixed" (racially and socio-economically), our samples involved primarily middle class (fee paying), Caucasian children).

Perhaps somewhat surprising is the lack of significant differences among the other thirteen comparisons. Although several may "approach" significance, the majority don't come anywhere near. Because of difficulties associated with determining the probability of a Type II error, it is a common research practice to disregard nonsignificant

findings (and to garner more subjects in an active pursuit of significance). This may be particularily relevant given the limited sample size of the present investigation; as well as the fact that all subjects were from Northwest Wisconsin (a somewhat selective sample).

On the other hand, if group and family day care do differ in a major and substantive fashion (as many appear to believe), then more of the comparisons should have proven at least marginally significant. The present findings indicate at least the possibility that there exist no overwhelming and meaningful differences between group and family day care in general, at least in many of the variables examined (a conclusion similar to that of Innes et al., 1982). It is perhaps appropriate for both opponents and proponents of family day care to consider this possibility.

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Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and T-test Results for Each of the Sixteen Comparative Measures[a]

	Group Care		Family Care		
	Mean	s	Mean	s	t
Child Variables					
Pos. Interaction with Peers	23.8	13.9	15.1	15.1	1.86
Prosocial to Peers	6.3	10.3	5.9	7.3	.14
Helping Peers	5.8	8.2	3.9	5.8	.8
Pos. Interaction with Adults	12.1	9.9	6.1	4.6	2.28[b]
Imaginative Play	11.4	13.7	5.4	7.4	1.60
Prosocial Aggression	4.9	5.8	3.8	5.7	.60
Hostile Aggression	1.5	2.7	1.0	1.5	.62
Total Aggression	5.5	6.0	4.1	5.6	.76
Task Persistence	16.7	14.5	14.0	14.9	.58
Waiting Patiently	4.9	8.8	2.7	3.0	.95
Teacher Variables					
Structure	4.6	.4	2.4	1.3	3.75[b]
Warmth	3.8	.7	3.4	.6	1.04
Number Children Per Teacher	7.6	2.1	3.6	2.1	3.31[b]
Environment Variables					
Health and Safety	9.6	1.8	9.6	3.6	.02
Materials and Activities	9.6	1.1	8.6	2.8	.73
Physical Space	6.6	1.8	6.3	2.5	.17

a For Child Variables, $df=39$

For Teacher and Environment Variables, $df=11$

b $p < .05$